

Teaching Plan
EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: August 6, 2017
Lesson Title: "The Confession"
Lesson Passage: Psalm 51:1-17

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Psalm 51 is a poignant prayer of confession by an individual who has sinned and who comes to God confessing his sin, asking for forgiveness and restoration of the fellowship with God which has been broken by sin. It plumbs the depths of a sin-wracked life and lifts the heart up to God for divine cleansing. This psalm has much to teach us about confession of sin and restoration of the sinner, especially when supplemented by New Testament scriptures that emphasize the same truths.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOAL

(1) Identify New Testament teachings that have to do with confession and forgiveness. (2) Explain the relationship between confession and forgiveness.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

Refer to the frequently repeated saying, "The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible." Observe that numerous Old Testament concepts are verified, and often amplified, by New Testament writings. Suggest that examining parallel passages in the New Testament will be a useful approach to interpreting Psalm 51.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

SUGGESTION: To facilitate comparison of the New Testament passages listed below with portions of Psalm 51, write the N.T. references on slips of paper and distribute them to class members who will be asked to read them when called upon:

1. The psalmist's plea for mercy is not based on his own merit, but, rather, on God's "steadfast" (i.e., "constant") love and mercy (51:1). (Let someone read **Romans 5:8** and **Ephesians 1:7**.) NOTE: In its singular form, the Hebrew word translated "mercy" means "womb, suggesting the sense of deep-seated feelings that one has for a person who is especially near and dear.

2. Confession is the only road to forgiveness. "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me" (Ps. 51:3, implies that the psalmist intends to confess all his sins, and will not hide anything). (Refer to **1 John 1:8-9**.)

3. No matter who else is offended by sin, all sin is against the will of God. ("Against you, you only, I have sinned," Ps. 51:4.) (Read **Romans**

8:7. Also, refer to **Ephesians 4:30**, which tells us that sins "grieve the Holy Spirit of God.")

4. Sin is not a momentary behavioral misstep (as implied by the oft-repeated alibi, "We all make mistakes"), but, rather, a chronic sickness of the soul deeply rooted in one's personality (Ps. 51:5). EXPLANATION: "In sin did my mother conceive me" does not mean that the psalmist's mother sinned when she became pregnant. What the psalmist is implying is that the tendency to sin is ingrained in human nature and permeates all of human experience. (Suggest that Paul evidently had this inborn tendency to sin in mind when he wrote **Romans 7:21-25**.)

5. God is not impressed by an outward show of piety. He desires "truth in the inner parts" (v. 6). (This corresponds closely to what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are the pure in heart," **Matt. 5:8**.)

6. Restoration of a sinner must include cleansing as well as forgiveness (Ps. 51:7). ILLUSTRATION: Like products that are sold in sets that cannot be separated, forgiveness is available only when packaged with cleansing. To get rid of guilt, we must be willing to be rid of the sin. (Refer again to **1 John 1:9** – "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.")

7. The sinner needs more than absolution from past sins; he also needs spiritual renewal, that he might be inoculated against future temptations. ("Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me," Ps. 51:10.) (Compare Psalm 51:10 and **Romans 12:2**. Both of these passages emphasize renewal of the mind and heart. But it is God who does the renewing.)

8. In Psalm 51:12 the psalmist asks God to give him the will to be righteous. (Ask class members to note carefully what is said in **Phil. 2:13** – "it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.")

9. The proper response to God's forgiveness is to devote oneself to turning others to God. "Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you," Psalm 51:13. (Note how frequently the people who were touched by Jesus became witnesses. EXAMPLES: The Gadarene Demoniac, in **Mark 5:20**. The woman of Samaria, in **John 4:39**. The man at the Pool of Bethesda, **John 5:15**.)

CLOSING THE LESSON

Conclude the lesson with this thought-provoking quotation: "The only sin you cannot conquer is the sin you will not admit, and the only sin God cannot forgive is the sin you dress up in the white robes of righteousness. Excuses and self-defense leave you with your sins compounded. Even an unintentional mistake becomes a sin when you try to defend it. But a mistake can turn into a source of strength when you face it fairly" (Harold Walker, *Power to Manage Yourself*).

